

GOOD KING WENCESLAS Worksheet

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Verse 1

Good King Wenceslas looked out on the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night, though the frost was
cruel,
When a poor man came in sight, gathering winter fuel.

Verse 2

"Hither, page, and stand by me, if you know it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he? Where and what his dwelling?"
"Sire, he lives a good league hence, underneath the
mountain,
Right against the forest fence, by Saint Agnes' fountain."

Verse 3

"Bring me food and bring me wine, bring me pine logs
hither,
You and I will see him dine, when we bear them thither."
Page and monarch, forth they went, forth they went
together,
Through the cold wind's wild lament and the bitter weather.

Verse 4

"Sire, the night is darker now, and the wind blows stronger,
Fails my heart, I know not how; I can go no longer."
"Mark my footsteps, my good page, tread now in them
boldly,
You shall find the winter's rage freeze your blood less
coldly."

Verse 5

In his master's steps he trod, where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod which the saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure, wealth or rank
possessing,
You who now will bless the poor shall yourselves find
blessing.

Vocabulary In one or two words define the following terms from the poem.

Verse 1: Feast of Stephen,

Verse 2: Hither, page, Yonder, peasant, dwelling, Sire, league, hence, Saint Agnes' fountain

Verse 3: dine, bear, thither, monarch, lament

Verse 4: tread, boldly

Verse 5: trod, dinted, sod

Word Pictures Word pictures is another way of saying *imagery*. *Imagery* or *figurative language* helps us form a picture of what the author is trying to present. Discuss what these word pictures mean and, perhaps, draw your idea of the *imagery* or *figurative language* the author uses!

Verse 1: snow lay round about; Brightly shone the moon that night; poor man ... gathering winter fuel

Verse 2: Hither page ... stand by me; lives ... underneath the mountain ... against the forest fence

Verse 3: Bring me food ... wine ... pine logs; cold wind's wild lament; bitter weather

Verse 4: night is darker; wind blows stronger; fails my heart; Mark my footsteps ... tread in them boldly

Verse 5: In his master's steps he trod; bless the poor shall yourselves find blessing

Mechanics are the nuts and bolts of a poem. Verbally discuss.

Who is the speaker? (Does the speaker have a specific personality or has the author remained in the background so the message of the poem will be more clear?)

What does the poem reveal about the speaker's character? (Sometimes, poems reveal nothing about the speaker's personal thoughts, feelings, or attitudes. Yet, the poem may demonstrate those character traits that are important to the author like courage, loyalty, perseverance, etc.)

Is the speaker addressing someone in particular or is it to anyone? (Sometimes poems are not directed to anyone in particular, but to anyone that may read it.)

Does the poem have a setting? (Does the author tell where the poem occurs? Is the poem about a specific event?)

Is the poem about a particular event? (Is the event past or present? If it is about a past event, does the remembrance of the event have a particular meaning to the speaker?)

Is the theme of the poem stated directly or indirectly? (Some poems are straightforward and are meant to be taken literally. In songs, the theme may be presented in the refrain or in the last few lines. Sometimes the theme is a little bit more difficult to discern as it is made with figurative language or symbols.)

What point of view or perspective is the speaker? (What meaning do you think the poem has for the author?)

How did you respond to the poem when you read it the first time? (Did your thoughts and feelings change after you took time to study it?)

Comprehension Questions Verbally discuss

Verse 1: Who looked out? What was the name of the feast? What did he see? What was the man doing? How was he described?

Verse 2: Why does the king call and why does he call them? Did you notice the term *hither*? Why do you think the author used this term? What does the page tell the king? Did you develop an idea of where the peasant lived by the page's description? Do you think the king would have understood?

Verse 3: What three (3) things does the king tell the page to bring him? Why? What do the page and the monarch do? Why? Describe the weather. What does this tell you about the king?

Verse 4: The night becomes darker and the wind blows stronger. How does the page react? Explain and discuss: "Fails my heart, I know not how; I can go no longer." Do you think it is understandable why they page is frightened? Does the king give up, quit or give in? What does the king tell the page to do?

Verse 5: What does the page do? Who does the author of this poem call a saint? Why? Explain and discuss: "Christian men, be sure, wealth or rank possessing, You who now will bless the poor shall yourselves find blessing."

Did this historical event and the message become more real to you after reading this poem? Why?

After reading this poem, what character traits did you think of? What does the Bible have to say about these character traits?

What Does the Bible Say?

Find Scripture proofs for each of the assertions or statements made for each of the five verses .

Re-read the Gospel accounts of the Nativity along with Isaiah 53. What does the Bible have to say about serving others? duty? mumbling/grumbling/complaining? courage?

Many falsely hold that courage is the absence of fear. However, courage is going on and standing up for the right or doing the right thing in spite of our fears. Can you think of any Biblical characters that demonstrated courage? Can you think of any historical personages that demonstrated courage? Do you know of any that demonstrate courage today? Why would courage be a Christian virtue?

The Author/Poet

Based on what you have studied about this poem so far, would you guess that the author was a Christian or a humanist? How did you arrive at your decision?

John M. Neale (1818-1866) and Thomas Helmore (1811-1890) translated this poem to English and was first published in *Carols for Christmastide* (London, England: 1853). Neale translated many ancient and medieval hymns. Helmore was born 7 May 1811, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, England, and died 6 July 1890, Westminster, England. Helmore graduated from Magdalen College, Oxford (B.A. 1840, M.A. 1845) and was ordained in the Anglican church.

Wenceslas was Duke of Bohemia.

Geography

Locate England on a globe, map and atlas.

Challenge Locate Kidderminster, Worcestershire, Westminster and Bohemia on a map or in an atlas.

Compare/contrast the weather from England and/or Bohemia with your own for one week.

Make an English and/or a Bohemian meal for your family.

Activities

1) Make your own book! Without making an image of Christ, draw pictures representing each verse. (Note: that will be five different illustrations). With construction paper and other items readily available at home, make a title page with the name of the song and the author's name which will be your book's cover. You may want to illustrate your cover and include this poem in your book.

2) Make your own play! Re-enact with your siblings or friends the event and message discussed in this poem. Keep it lively, simple, and short. You may want to end your play with singing a rousing chorus of this poem or reading Scripture verses. Videotape your creation.

3) Radio Drama! With a handheld tape recorder, create your own radio show dramatizing the historical event and message of this poem.

4) Be a Reporter! Either with your family camcorder or with a handheld tape recorder, “interview” various individuals connected with this poem (e.g., King Wenceslas, the page, soldiers at Valley Forge, WWI and WWII soldiers in the winter, etc.). In order to have the fast paced style of a reporter, watch and/or listen to the news with your parents’ permission. Keep the interviews lively, quick, and to the point.

Remain objective! Being objective means just reporting the facts and not giving your opinion of the situation.

5) What is one of the things you most enjoy? Is it literature? math? science? sports? cooking? Take that area of interest and relate that to this poem. If you enjoy dance, for example, develop a dance routine that physically expresses the sentiments of this poem. If you enjoy shop, create something out of wood that helps to clarify this poem. Do you enjoy creating stories? Write a story based on any time period you desire that expresses the sentiments of this poem. Do you enjoy creating things in the kitchen? Make an ancient meal from this time or develop your own meal that symbolizes the many different points this poem makes.

6) Poster. Create a poster illustrating the the author’s view of the impact of *Good King Wenceslas*.

7) Scavenger Hunt. Go to the library to learn what you can about John M. Neale (1818-1866), Thomas Helmore (1811-1890) and King Wenceslas was Duke of Bohemia and share it with your family. If possible, discover the story behind this poem.